Unit .04

Session .01

God Redeems Betrayal

Scripture

Genesis 37:3-8,18-28

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons
because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age,
and he made a robe of many colors for him. **4** When
his brothers saw that their father loved him more than
all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring
themselves to speak peaceably to him. **5** Then Joseph
had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they
hated him even more. **6** He said to them, "Listen to
this dream I had: **7** There we were, binding sheaves
of grain in the field. Suddenly my sheaf stood up, and
your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to
my sheaf." **8** "Are you really going to reign over us?"
his brothers asked him. "Are you really going to rule
us?" So they hated him even more because of his dream
and what he had said. … **18** They saw him in the
distance, and before he had reached them, they plotted
to kill him.**19** They said to one another, "Oh, look,
here comes that dream expert! **20** So now, come on,
let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We
can say that a vicious animal ate him. Then we'll see
what becomes of his dreams!" **21** When Reuben heard
this, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let's
not take his life." **22** Reuben also said to them, "Don't
shed blood. Throw him into this pit in the wilderness,
but don't lay a hand on him"—intending to rescue him
from them and return him to his father. **23** When
Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped off Joseph's
robe, the robe of many colors that he had on. **24** Then
they took him and threw him into the pit. The pit
was empty, without water. **25** They sat down to eat
a meal, and when they looked up, there was a caravan
of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were
carrying aromatic gum, balsam, and resin, going down
to Egypt. **26** Judah said to his brothers, "What do
we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?
27 Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not
lay a hand on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh,"
and his brothers agreed. **28** When Midianite traders
passed by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and
sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites,
who took Joseph to Egypt.

Intro Options

Main Point:
The sin of favoritism and jealousy continue in Jacob's family.

Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Option 1

Memories are powerful. A sight, sound, or smell can transport us back to a specific time or place. While some memories are pleasant—being in your grandmother's kitchen, scoring a game-winning touchdown, or going on that first date—some are not. Sometimes memories evoke deep pain, heartache, and sorrow, especially when they were born in childhood. Many of us carry these scars for years, sometimes for the rest of our lives.

- **What are some of the best memories you have from childhood? Is there anything that triggers those memories (a certain smell, hearing a specific song, seeing a shaggy dog, etc.)?**

Joseph was a man well acquainted with days full of pain, heartache, and sorrow. While his father, Jacob, favored him and lavished him with love and gifts, his brothers detested him. Their jealousy and bitterness would lead them to betray him, sell him into slavery, and tell their father he was dead. As Joseph was led away in chains, the first domino had fallen, but it would not be the last. Joseph's life would be a series of one difficult event leading to another. Betrayal led to slavery. Slavery led to imprisonment. Moments of hope were mixed in, but these moments were fleeting. They would give way to disappointment and years of desperation.

Option 2

Give each student a piece of paper. Instruct students to title the page *Five Favorites* and ask them to come up with their top five favorite celebrities. (These may include people who are "social media famous" as well as musicians, actors, comedians, and other public figures.) Then, place students in groups and ask them to come up with an answer to these questions:

- **How might being someone's favorite celebrity negatively affect that person?**
- **How does favoritism negatively affect the person "playing favorites"?**

Although our favorite celebrities may not notice when one person unfollows them or leaves a nasty comment, our answers to these two questions can give us some insight into the way Joseph's story started. Jacob played favorites, which led to jealousy, brothers turning against one another, and a world of hurt and anxiety for this family.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Genesis 37:3-8.

Activity

Ask students do a thought experiment in where they imagine that they have 12 brothers (or sisters). Ask them questions like these: *If you could pick where you were in the birth order, where would it be*? *What would the benefits be for having that many siblings*? *What challenges might exist*? Add any additional questions that might get your students thinking about Joseph's family circumstances in light of what he was facing.

Jacob's special treatment of Joseph was wonderful for him, but disastrous for Jacob's other sons. Joseph's brothers hated him, and Joseph didn't help the situation when he told his brothers about his dream in which their sheaves of grain bowed to his. The meaning of the dream was not lost on the brothers: They would one day bow to Joseph. Sharing this dream may not have been the best idea for Joseph; his brothers did not respond with great joy, realizing there was a seer in their midst. Instead, they hated him more because of the dream.

- **How has favoritism harmed you or others in a family, at school, or in some other setting?**

Our biblical ancestors often had reasons for their preferences: God told Rebekah He had chosen Jacob over Esau and Jacob bargained with Lot for Rachel, not Leah (Gen. 25:23; 29:18). However, favoritism can never be justified. Favoritism is a sin. Favoritism says one person is worth more than others—a claim that undermines the image of God in each of us. God had a special plan for Joseph, which is apparent merely by the number of chapters covering his life in Genesis. But God also had plans for Jacob's other sons. The Messiah, after all, would not come from Joseph's line, but Judah's. God calls on us to see the worth He has given to each person and to love without partiality. This is why favoritism is so harmful. Knowing you are loved less than another brings about pain, hatred, and strife.

- **Why is it important that we affirm the image of God in all people?**

The journey from Joseph's dreams to the fulfillment of God's plan would be long and difficult. But it's important to see how his dreams set the stage for the conclusion of Genesis. God's overarching plan was to bless the entire world through Abraham's offspring. Joseph's dreams gave a glimpse of this plan coming to fruition at the end of Genesis because, through Joseph's exaltation above his brothers and father, God would not only rescue Israel, but He would also rescue the surrounding people groups.

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 8, DDG)*

Temptation and Sin

Temptation is not the equivalent of sin. Temptation can refer to natural and good desires that are twisted and directed toward pleasing of self rather than giving glory to God. Jesus was tempted like we are (Matt. 4), and yet He never sinned, but faithfully resisted temptation and followed the will of His Father. Knowing our weakness, we are to be on guard against temptation that may lead us to sin (Matt. 26:41), and we pray for God to deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Genesis 37

37:2-8. If Jacob had nothing else going for him, at least he was consistent. Jacob didn't try to hide his favoritism of Rachel over Leah or his preference of Joseph over his other sons. The multi-colored robe Jacob gave Joseph was an obvious symbol of the love he had for the son born to his favorite wife, Rachel. It also drew the attention and jealousy of his other sons. This robe may have been more than a gift to a favored son. It may have signified Jacob's choice of Joseph to lead the family after him.[1] Maybe Jacob chose Joseph for this honor, rationalizing that he was the firstborn son of Rachel, the woman Jacob loved. Joseph was the firstborn who *really* counted. Or maybe Jacob cast aside the cultural norm of his day and chose Joseph just like God had chosen him for the firstborn privileges over his older brother Esau. While we can't be sure this is what Jacob intended by giving Joseph the multi-colored robe, Jacob placing Joseph in the role of a supervisor over his brothers supports the possibility (Gen. 37:12-17).

37:9-11. Joseph then recounted a second dream in which the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed to him (Gen. 37:9-11). This time his brothers wouldn't need to respond to Joseph; Jacob would. Jacob rebuked Joseph for implying that he, Joseph's mother, and the brothers would bow to him.

Maybe Jacob's response validated how Joseph's brothers felt about him. It's possible that their father's rebuke of the favored son fueled what would happen later. Surely, it didn't help the situation. Jacob's rebuking Joseph showed his brothers that even a favored son is not exempt from discipline. By this time, the brothers' jealousy and anger were rooted in their minds and hearts. The situation was growing more precarious, waiting for a spark to set off a violent explosion.

In Defense *(p. 9, DDG)*

Skeptics try to use the existence of evil and suffering as an argument to prove God doesn't exist. Why doesn't this argument work? They would need to prove God doesn't have good reasons to permit evil and suffering in our world, which is difficult since we are not omniscient like God. What's more interesting is that atheists who reject God on the basis of evil in the world actually hurt their argument in the end. Think about it: If you do away with God, then you do away with objective goodness; if you do away with objective goodness, you do away with its opposite (evil). By rejecting God, the atheist has no leg to stand on when making moral pronouncements like "human trafficking is wrong" or "racism is bad."

TEACHING PLAN

Despite the suffering Joseph would experience, God would use the terrible circumstances to exalt Joseph and save his family (along with many others). God gave the family a picture of this plan through Joseph's dreams. It's not surprising that Joseph's brothers did not like the plan, but the dreams pointed to the way God would save them from famine and certain death.

- **We can learn from Joseph's brothers. No matter how much we may not like what God is doing, we can trust that God's plan for our future is better than any plan we can come up with for ourselves. What are some dreams you have for your future? How might God's plans be better?**

At some point after Joseph shared his dreams with his family, his brothers went into the fields with their father's flocks. Jacob sent Joseph to report back on his brothers. But when they saw Joseph in the distance, his brothers recognized an opportunity to rid themselves of the one they hated so much.

Read Genesis 37:18-22.

Joseph's brothers were blinded by jealousy, hatred, and strife. Jacob was apparently blind as well, since he naively sent Joseph to report on his brothers, not knowing the danger that awaited his favorite son. The doting father had given his vengeful sons the opportunity they needed against his beloved son. In Proverbs 27:4, King Solomon warned, "Fury is cruel, and anger a flood, but who can withstand jealousy?" Joseph and Jacob would soon see the wisdom of Solomon's warning.

- **Why can jealousy be more harmful than anger or fury?**

Read Genesis 37:23-28.

Jacob's oldest son, Reuben, asked his brothers not to kill Joseph and to cast him into a pit instead. However, Reuben's stand *against* murder was not enough. He failed to stand *for* his brother. He, and every other brother there that day, failed to defend Joseph and call the other brothers to turn away from their sin. Without saying or doing anything, the brothers found another opportunity to sin against their brother, their father, and, above all, their God.

In the end, the brothers did not murder Joseph—at least not with their hands. But they did murder him in their hearts (Matt. 5:21-26), as they sold him into slavery. Joseph's brothers devised an evil plan, but God works all things together for good—even the brother's jealousy, bitterness, and betrayal. God would bring about redemptive reversal—using the brother they cast aside and sold into slavery to preserve their lives in a foreign land. Joseph had to get to Egypt to stand before Pharaoh. Once there, he would use his God-given ability to interpret dreams to help Pharaoh prepare for the coming famine. God used the brothers' sin of selling Joseph into slavery to position Joseph to save the lives of the very ones who reviled him for being a dreamer and to preserve the line of the coming Messiah. On that day, the brothers would indeed bow to Joseph as he had dreamed.

- **What can make us envy God's plan for someone else rather than accept the one He has laid out for us?**
- **How have you seen God turn around situations for His glory and our good?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Genesis 37

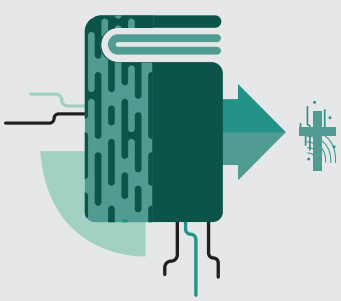
37:21-22. We don't know why, but Reuben interceded for Joseph and convinced his brothers not to kill him. Reuben probably saw himself as a hero. He was saving his brother's life, intending to rescue him later. We might want to applaud Reuben's actions here—it was good that he saved Joseph's life. But notice his counter offer: throw Joseph—their brother—into a pit.

Before we credit Reuben for what he said and did for Joseph, we should consider what he *failed* to say and do. What he *should have* said and done. Reuben should have rebuked his brothers. He should have called on them to repent of their sin of jealousy and hatred and for even considering murdering their brother. He should have demanded that they receive Joseph with open arms rather than an open pit. But it wasn't just Reuben who should have done this. Each of the other brothers was accountable for his failure to come to his brother's defense—the defense Joseph deserved and needed, not a defense contingent on going along with the brothers only to trick them later. But the sin of jealousy had led each of them to view their brother Joseph no differently than they would an animal. Joseph was not a brother. He was not a person. He was an obstacle.

37:26-28. Once again, we might be tempted to credit Judah for remembering that Joseph was their brother and echoing Reuben's call for them not to murder him. But Reuben had wanted the brothers to throw Joseph into a pit so Reuben could rescue him later and then return him to their father. Maybe he was motivated by his father's praise. Here, Judah offered selling Joseph as a slave in place of killing him. Judah saw Joseph was worth enough not to take his life, but not worth more than twenty pieces of silver, divided between the brothers. It's also possible he was motivated by his own greed.

(p. 10, DDG) Christ Connection

Joseph was his father's beloved son who was betrayed by his own brothers and sold into slavery. Jesus is the Father's beloved Son who was betrayed by His own and died on the cross to rescue us from our sin.



GOD REDEEMS BETRAYAL

Genesis 37:3–8, 18–28

GOD REDEEMS BETRAYAL

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

SELF-CONTROL – Not acting carelessly on my own impulses, emotions and desires.

HEAD

Suffering is a part of life, but it doesn't prove God isn't real or doesn't care. What caused the suffering in Joseph's family and life? What role do you think sin has in suffering?

How did Joseph's brothers show a lack of self-control?

HEART

Professional athletes have a lot of self-control. They put great time and effort into training their bodies so they will be ready for the next competition. How can you apply that principle in other areas, such as school work, your chores or job or preparing for the future?

Jesus was betrayed by one of His closest followers (Matthew 26:14–15) and abandoned by the rest of His friends (Matthew 26:47, 56) the night before He was crucified. How might the fact that Jesus also suffered and was betrayed help you when you face similar situations?

HANDS

Think about the way you live—do you have self-control when you are angry, sad, jealous or excited? Write down a specific incident when you did not have self-control when you felt one of those emotions. Find a Bible verse to memorize and recite the next time you are angry, sad or jealous. Write it down here and commit to memorizing it for the next week. Recite it to your LifeWise teacher.